"SUNRISE...SUNSET"
Isaiah 40:6-8; 54:10
I Corinthians 13:8-13

Communion Meditation
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I missed the movie "Fiiler on the Roof", but I can remember the first time I heard the song "Sunrise...Sunset." (from Fiddler on Roof) I't a haunting melody, and my reaction to the lyrics, as I heard hem on the car radio, was sadness. An involuntary reaction, because I wasn't listening articularly carefully. It XXXXXX was almost as if the song had a power of its own to penetrate eeply and get at a tender nerve.

Listen to the words:

"Is this the little girl I carried?
Is this the little boy at play?
I don't remember growing older...
When did they?
Now is the little boy a bridggroom.
Now is the little girl a bride.
Under the canopy I see them
Side by side.
Sunrise...Sunset...
Swiftly fly the years
One season following another
Laden with happiness and tears."

The tender nerve that song found in me; the nerve which I am assuming is universally ender in all men, is sadness at the inexorable movement of time: anxiety as a result of the changes that time brings: nostalgia = that yesterday is gone and will never be again.

It's a tander nerve that the holiday deason always touches. An important part of the way e celebrate Christmas as families is to remember the past. We look back fondly to our own hildhood and recall our excitement and glee as if it were yesterday. We remember the relatives ho were an important part of that experience and are gone now. And as if that emotional load ere not heavy enough, along comes New Years just one week later; an event that forces us to ook backward and contemplate the time which is now gone, and to acknowledge that we are older nd different.

The passing of time - like an ever-flowing stream is more important to us that we rdinarily realize. And it doesn't take much to prompt most of us to sadness and nostalgia.

The Bible tends to be direct, honest and hardnosed about the process of change and time that we're thinking about. The ancient Jews and early Christians didn't kid themselves. Unlike a lot of other religions they were singularly unconcerned with making time stand still and preserving forwever the glory and power of youth. "There is a time for everything" XXXXXXXX Ecclesiates teaches - even dying. The Psalmist wrote"

"Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth.

And the heavens and the work of thy hands.

They will perish..."

And the prophet, whose words we read in the Old Testament lesson - even more graphically...

"All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass witheres, the flower fades..."

The prophet even acknowledged that there was nothing particularly permanent about those very symbols of permanence and stability:

"For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed..."

And in that beloved section of 1 Corinthians on love, we read Paul's unblinking honesty about time and change: "The work of the prophets will end one day, the tongues of ecstacy will cease, and knowledge will vanish away."

In each of those passages, and throughout the Bible there is an absolutely honest acknowledgement of mortality - the process of change and againg in which all men are involved. XX I have suggested that the process is important; that And while we may not talke about it much, it is a loaded item for us emotionally. It is something with which all of us must come to terms, in some fashion or another.

And we do, ordinarily, in one of three ways. The first, and perhaps most common, is to try to ignore the passing of time, and more aggressively, to defy it. We can pretend that time isn't passing: or at least that it isn't making any difference. Everyone else may be getting older, but not us. Now, theme is obviously a heavy culture and commerical contribution at this point. The advertising industry has discovered that the American consumer wants power, prestige, sexuality and youth, and that products are highly marketable if they promise the preservation or reintroduction of youthfulness. There aren't, after all, many products on television advertised by people over sixty: and if there are, its a very well manicurred and preserved sixty. On the contrary, youth is attractive, alive; and sets the trend in

in clothing, music, automobiles. The reason is that there are millions of middle-aged people willing to spend money in order to defy the processes of time.

The Rev. Ernest Campbell of Riverside Church in New York calls it the "Once de Leon anxiety"; Ponce, you will recall was a Spanish Conquistidor who discovered Florida, but what he was really looking for was a legendary spring the waters of which could made old men young again. Ponce was 52 when he set out to find the fountain of youth and Campbell observes that: "Those of us who have known the heat of forty summers or more can readily identify with this quest. We fight the calendar the way a loosing football team fights the clock."

Or consider the 1973 phenomenon of Bobby Riggs. The importance of Bobby Riggs for most men, I think, was not that he got on the court with the Women's Wimbeldon Champ - obviously that didn't pan out - but that at his age he could look and act and sound like a brash oyoung man. Or George Blanda, 46, still playing for the Oakland Raiders: when he shuffles onto the field to do battle with 25 year old behemoths, gray hair and all, every middle-aged man in America feels good. Or Frazier, the ancient lion, blind, mangy, crippled, who died this year; But whose company was so pleasant for his two younger mates that they literally stood him up between them to take his daily stroll.

Now there is something very good and very healthy about refusing to give in to the change time brings: there is no reason to roll-over and play dead. Life is precious and needs to be lived enthusiastically - vigorously. But it can become a sickness, a neurotic refusal to deal with reality, a charade. Richard Lancaster suggests that one of the most important developmental tasks we must accomplish is the realization that we are not immortal: that, in fact, we are not in complete control of the way life will come at us. We need to cultivate control of the way life will come at us. We need to cultivate the integrity of age: the grace of living honestly with the changes time has wrought. And that is most difficult to do if we are caught in an obsession with youth.

A second way of dealing with the movement and change of time is to resign oneself to it. This is the stoic position that says: you can't beat it, so why fight it? There is honesty and courage and dignity here - but also great sadness. The person who is simply resigned to the passing of time, always seems to be looking backward to the good old days. The past always seems better than the present, and the future is regarded only with depression. I know a lot

of people like that:people "putting in time": waiting to die: living with all the measuringz zest and significance of their lives located somewhere in the past.

But there is a third position. There is a way of dealing with time and change that says "yes" to it: that embraces change: that sees each new day as an opportunity for growing, experiencing, learning, living anew. When I encounter it in an older person I am always deeply moved. On Christmas day we paid a visit on an elderly lady in a Nursing home, and I anticipated a rather depressing experience. Instead we found here sitting up brightly, surrounded by cards and winter pictures she had cut out of magazines, thrilled with the snow and wanting to talk - of all things - about the proper oven temperature to bake a turkey. It was a good experience for all of us.

The victorious way of dealing with time and change is based on faith. Not that shallow wishful thinking that God will protect us from time, or make life easy for us; but that behind all the changes of the years, all the sunrises and sunsets, is something that never changes.

Listen again to the integrity of the Bible:

The grass withers and the flower fades

But the word of our God will stand forever.

The mountains may depart and the hills be removed,

But my steadfast love will not depart from you....says the Lord.

"Prophecy will pass away: tongues will cease: knowledge will disappear. But love never ends... the love of God in Jesus Christ."

There is integrity here: honest acceptance that time is moving; that change is happening to us. But - it's all going on within the framework of something that never changes.

"My steadfast love shall not depart from you."

"Is this the little girl I carried?

Is this the little boy at play?

Yes it is. But an even better poem was penned by Robert Browning

"Our times are in his hand

Who saith, A whole I planned,

Youth shows but half; trust God:

See all, nor be afraid." (Rabbi Ben Ezra)

add prayer - our

The promise of the Gospel is that God's love is permanent. It does not change.

So at the beginning of a new year - as we look backward and forward - we come to that place where that love is celebrated and poured out and shared. His table.

"Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be thou our guard while life shall last,
And our eternal home." AMEN

Father, we are grateful for the time you have given us. Grant us grace to accept the changes that have happened to us: and faith to live each day in your love that never changes. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN